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EVELEEN O'CONNOR; A TALE.

I was travelling once in a remote part of Ireland, and being doomed to the annoyance of waiting in the Irish inn of an Irish country town, for the arrival of an Irish stage coach—circumstances which I *then* considered sufficiently prominent in the catalogue of human miseries—I was naturally anxious to distinguish the first sight or even sound of the vehicle that was to bear me from them; and accordingly I took my station in the window, where, however, my listlessness was soon dispelled by finding I had attracted the attention of an object, who directly engaged mine. It was a young woman, who had placed herself in the street, exactly opposite to me. Her appearance was such as must altogether produce an instantaneous interest in a beholder's mind: her arms were crossed on her breast, so that each hand—not the *ruddy* hands of a country damsel—but pale, bloodless-looking, and attenuated, lay almost on the opposite shoulder; an attitude which, joined to the expression of her up-turned face and eyes, gave her a sort of beseeching air well calculated for effect—and it produced on me the effect I thought was designed, for I immediately threw some money into the street. My unasked donation was not however noticed; the melancholy of the fine eyes that were still fastened upon me was suddenly illumined with a brightness that shone over, but did not dispel it—while, without changing her attitude, she broke out into a sweet, wild, sad song: its untaught breathings seemed to come from the very soul of sorrow. The deceptive brilliancy, too, that danced fitfully over the gloom of her countenance, and the deep-speaking sadness of her eyes, seemed to tell a sad, sad tale of the anguish that had made shipwreck of the peace and hope of her mind for ever.

I rang the bell, to enquire the history of this interesting-looking creature, and heard that she was “a poor innocent that every one was good to.” Had she no friends, I asked. “O yes! plenty—*every one is friends to her*, poor soul!” “But no individual friends—no relations—no one to take care of her?” “Sure God takes care of her, when he took away the crature's rason: there was an ould man used to go about with her; people said he was her father—but he was quite worn out; and one day they found him lying dead by the wayside, a little beyant the town, and she sitting beside him, not screeching or crying at all at all, but jist as quite (quiet) as if she was watching a child sleeping in its cradle: they say she come from the other side o' the mountains, and that her name is Eveleen O'Connor.”

Eveleen O'Connor! I repeated, and instantly recalled to mind a story I had heard when last in the place to which I was now going, and which I had been the subject of intense interest in the family among whom I was then visiting. I desired that poor Eveleen might be brought into the room where my lunch yet remained on the table: she did not speak at all; but while eagerly partaking of the food, I had an opportunity of observing her more closely. Her features were handsome, even strikingly so, but her complexion very sallow, probably through suffering; her eyes, which first attracted my notice, were singularly fine, of a clear dark hazel, and at times bore scarcely any traces of an unsettled mind: the tight short sleeves, and closely fitting body of a dark blue linsey-woolsey gown, showed her wasted but finely formed figure to advantage: she wore neither cap nor bonnet; her hair was drawn back from the forehead, and fastened up behind with a sort of skewer, as is common

in every part of Ireland. As soon as her meal was ended, she broke out again into her wild sweet song, which lasted till the coach came up that was to convey me to the native place of the poor unconscious being I left an outcast and an alien in "the place of strangers."

Eveleen O'Connor was the daughter of a man who was not only, in the language of the country, well to do in the world, but who, both in his own opinion and that of his neighbours, derived considerably more importance from the ancestral honours he reckoned, than from the acres of land which he possessed. Brian O'Connor could boast, in the phraseology he learnt from the village pedagogue, of being "descended in a direct and *mathematical straight line* from the ancient kings of Ireland;" nor were the smallest doubts entertained by any one of the legitimacy of his claims, or the mathematical precision of his line of descent; the unequivocal evidence supplied by the name of O'Connor determined that point—for every O'Connor *must* be a descendant of the great Roderick, who, to use a favourite speech of Brian's, was "the renowned and unfortunate king of a renowned and unfortunate land."

The hereditary pride of Brian O'Connor was, however, chiefly shown in the garrulity of an old simple-minded man; but in his son, who, after his kingly ancestor had been named Roderick, though he was known by no other name than that of Rory, pride assumed a deeper character.—He was a dark, disagreeable man, in whose disposition pride, passion and bigotry were the leading traits.

Brian's only other child (his wife was dead) was Eveleen, the gay, happy, handsome Eveleen, *la belle de campagne*, who dressed, and sang, laughed, danced and talked, without, as her admiring neighbours said, "a bit more pride nor stiffness than if she had come of nobody, and wasn't to have a fortin." His sister's demeanour was a sore grievance to Rory O'Connor, who often keenly reprov'd her for "making so little of herself by her condescension;" but Eveleen, though she shrunk at all times from the dark countenance of her brother, and doubly dreaded him when angry, persevered in her own way, never showing more pride or haughtiness, at the wake or wedding—the dance or evening walk, than a country beauty might assume, independent either of pedigree or portion.

One Sunday afternoon, Rory O'Connor came in to his dinner with a darker countenance than usual. Eveleen shrunk from him; his father looked the enquiry he dared not make; but the cause of his displeasure soon came out. Eveleen had been seen walking with Jem Delany—"a fellow she ought to be ashamed of looking the same side of the way with." Both father and brother fixed their eyes on Eveleen, while this was said. She did not reply as usual with an indignant toss of her head, or some saucy or jesting answer;—she turned suddenly round to the dresser, against which she had been leaning, and the crimson blush faded to a hue of ashy paleness. This was not calculated to lessen the suspicions of the latter; and flinging his chair against the wall, he swore, with a fearful oath, to be the death of Delany, if ever she disgraced her family by thinking of a fellow like him.

Eveleen ate no dinner, and when she had put away the things, she walked out by herself to the hazel grove at the back of the house. For the first time she dreaded to hear the laughing voices of her young companions—for, for the first time they would awake no answering feelings in her own heart. As she walked on, full of thought, scarcely knowing what she did, she reached towards a hazel bough to gather some nuts: it was too strong for her arm to bend—but a more powerful one

brought it down. Eveleen started, and her eyes fell, filled with tears, from the bright and honest ones that were fastened in anxious inquiry on her face. To Delany's question of what was the matter, she only replied at first, "not much, Jem;"—but the truth soon came out. "Well, Eveleen," said Delany, after a little silence, "you may get a richer husband, to be sure, but you will never get one who loves you better—though, heaven knows, I wish you one that may love you as well." A few words sometimes lead to a great many: these led Eveleen O'Connor finally to declare she never would marry a richer man; and even to promise she never would love another man than he who spoke them.

The rest of the love part of the story may be told in few words; the next fair-day Eveleen was mounted on a horse that waited for her outside the town, and carried upwards of twenty miles from 'her own place,' where a priest, who was related to Delany's family, married them. No sooner was this step taken, than a thousand fears as to its consequences overcame Eveleen: the place to which she had been brought, was not calculated to re-assure her as to its propriety; it was an old deserted house that had been temporarily fitted up for them by some of Delany's people, who lived near; and Eveleen's high spirits sank as she entered it. But she listened to her husband's assurances that all would be well; she saw him happy, and at last let him persuade her again, as he had before done, that "her people, when they found they could do no better, would give in to it."

The next day they intended to return, but the rain that fell in torrents seemed rather to concur with Delany's wishes, who by no means appeared so anxious to throw himself in the way of Rory O'Connor, as he had declared the preceding morning he was willing to do. Whenever he met the eye of his young wife, (whose fine features appeared to much greater advantage when shaded by the pensiveness which at times stole over them, and, however unsuited to the character of a happy bride, gave them additional charms,)—his own grew brighter, but a look of anxiety often darkened it; and the manner in which he occasionally argued with her on the *certainty* that her friends would *make it up with him*, showed that he entertained some doubts on the subject.

The evening of the second day was drawing on, and the wind that had all the morning been high, was increasing to a storm: the frail door rattled before it, and the rain that swept underneath, formed a flood half across the floor. Eveleen drew closer to her husband's side, and leaning her head on his shoulder, wept—but did *not* wish herself Eveleen O'Connor again, in the safe and happy home of her youth.

"Eveleen astore!" said Delany, "we will go back in the morning, and everything will be set to rights then—and you will be my own happy Eveleen. Let Rory keep all the money; sure I don't want to touch a farthing of it—it wasn't for that I married; and when he sees I don't want your fortune, he'll let me keep what I *do* want, and that's your own self, Eveleen dear!"

"Hush!" said Eveleen, raising her head, "don't you hear something?" A heavy sound was heard distinctly amidst the noise of the wind, as if of a number of feet approaching the door. A moment of breathless suspense followed: no very powerful blow was required to send in the crazy door, and a number of men, headed by Rory O'Connor, poured into the apartment. Believing their design was to tear his wife from him, Delany threw himself before her, exclaiming, "She is my wife." They were the last words he spoke; a shot, from a musket in Rory O'Connor's hand, laid him instantly a corpse before her.

They lifted the object of their pursuit from the still warm body of her murdered husband, and carried her back in seeming triumph; she breathed no lament, she uttered no reproach, she shed no tears, but sat pale, senseless, lifeless-looking, in a corner of her father's house, seldom giving any sign of existence except when the name of Delany met her ear; then she slightly started, and a convulsive shudder agitated for a moment her paralyzed frame.

With that extraordinary recklessness that so often marks the conduct of a man who has just forfeited his life to the laws of his country, O'Connor not only returned to his own place again, after Delany's murder, but appearing insensible of the danger to which he had exposed himself by it, was seemingly in no haste to seek safety by flight. It was not until warned by his friends, that "Delany's people were away to swear informations, and the polis wor out after him," that he prepared to abscond, and he had not got above a mile from his house when he was seized.

O'Connor did not want friends, as they were called, to assist in the pursuit of his sister; he was, nevertheless, no favourite in the country, while the honest, open-hearted Delany was universally so, and amidst the regret caused by his untimely death, few expressions of regard were sent after the author of it, as he was led by his house to the county gaol.

The assizes were then on the eve of commencing in the town, and the trial accordingly took place in a few days.

Before his judges O'Connor displayed the same surly pride of disposition that had always characterized him; betraying no signs of feeling, either of regret for the past, or apprehension of the future. But on hearing the first witness against him called, all this apparent insensibility vanished: his face grew livid, he clenched his hands so tightly that the nails seemed to enter the palms; his eyes, fastened on the witness-box, flashed a dark and deadly fire, and even his knees shook with the emotions of rage which he could not vent or control. All eyes were turned in the same direction his had taken, and fixed on the witness with intense interest. A sister appearing to condemn a brother as the murderer of her husband—it was a soul-thrilling spectacle.

Eveleen appeared to have been in some degree roused from the almost paralyzed state in which she had continued since the transaction; but her eyes wandered from the bench to the prisoner, and then round the court, with an expression that betrayed her inability to comprehend properly the scene she beheld, and the circumstances under which they were assembled: her face was deadly pale, with the exception of a very small spot of the deepest hectic that burned on either cheek. The counsel for the crown addressed a few words to the presiding judge, stating his intention, in consequence of the illness and distress of mind under which the witness was evidently labouring, of putting to her only such direct and leading questions as were requisite to convict the prisoner; then turning to her, he passed over all introductory questions, simply saying, "You were at ———, on the evening of the murder; who fired the shot that killed James Delany?" Eveleen turned her eyes slowly towards the speaker, they then wandered with the same slow and doubtful gaze round the court, while she repeated, in a bewildered sort of manner, and with deep intonation of voice, the only words that rested on her attention—"Who killed James Delany?"—these she twice repeated, and they seemed to unclothe the avenues of memory and reason which had been partially at least choked up, and to give her back a too horrible clear view of all that her previous insensibility had dimmed over: a

convulsive tremor ran through her frame while repeating slowly a second time, "who killed James Delany?" Her eyes instinctively turned to O'Connor, their lifeless expression vanished, a gleam of fiery light shone over their darkness, a piercing scream broke from her lips, and the awful question—"Who?"—rang through the court and tingled in the ears of the prisoner, while the wretched and unavailing witness sinking down in a fit, was carried out and conveyed back to her father's house, from which she had been unnecessarily brought. A brain fever followed, and Eveleen was long insensible to the misery of her state.—Whoever has had their mental faculties deranged by fever, and that fever, perhaps, induced by violently agitating circumstances, recollects the peculiar sensations which the first few moments of returning reason and the powers of perception afford, before a sense of pain or weakness comes on to confine their feelings to the present moment, and memory feebly wanders back, seeking a clue to guide them to the past. The stillness of the hour when Eveleen first partially recovered her reason, was favourable to such a feeling: not a sound was stirring in or around the house, except that of the

"Last lone songster of the fading year ;"

the robin that was perched on the top of the young ash-tree close by the window, and whose song seemed in unison with the pale soft twilight, and the melancholy stillness that pervaded every thing around the habitation of sorrow. The first object Eveleen clearly discerned, was the figure of her father, altered though it was, seated on the chest from which she used once to array herself in all the village finery, which, as well as her beauty, distinguished her among her companions. O'Connor had been a fresh, good-humoured-looking man, but he was sadly changed: his face was marked with lines of care, or sorrow, or both; his hair, even in so short a time, had been mixed with grey, his coat hung loose from his shrunken shoulders, his eye was dull and glassy, his hands buried within his open waistcoat, and his head bent down upon his breast. She looked at him, endeavouring to recall distinctly the ideas that vaguely floated on her scarcely settled brain, till he turned his head and looked inquiringly at her more composed countenance; then she articulated her first rational word—"Father"—at another time it would have thrilled his heart with joy, for it is sweet when the voice which was as music to our heart, has been uttering only the incoherent ravings of delirium, to hear again the *first* soft sound of affection, or even the first simple question that indicates returning reason. O'Connor's countenance, as he approached his unfortunate child, evinced no joy, beamed no affection, its expression chilled her inmost soul, and if pity and natural fondness were struggling in his, as he looked at the excited and haggard face, the pain-marked brow, the wandering and beseeching eye, that seemed to implore comfort, sympathy, support, from all it gazed upon,—there was also there a load of grief, deep, deep, corroding grief, and burning shame that *she* had caused; and was that grief, was that sense of shame, *lighter* by being caused by one who had been the joy and pride of his heart? Oh, no! no hand ever wounds so deeply as that which we have loved and cherished, no reproach can fester in the heart like that *a friend*, or, above all, "a thankless child," draws on us.

O'Connor gazed inquiringly on his daughter, as if to ascertain the fact of her mental restoration; Eveleen was just able to make out his meaning. "Is that you, father," she said in a languid voice. "Oh! then, you miserable creature," said O'Connor, wringing his hands in

agony of mind, "is it coming back to your senses you are, when it would be better for you and me to have lost them out and out; do you come to yourself the very day that you have brought your poor unfortunate brother to the gallows?"

Eveleen sat up on her elbow and gazed earnestly in his face; the poor man, overcome by his afflictions, was incapable of observing the effect of his words. "Oh! Rory, Rory!" he cried, putting his hands before his face, "did I ever think I'd live to see you die such a death." Eveleen had now acquired sudden strength, she was sitting erect in the bed, drawing her hand over her forehead, while her eyes wandered slowly and doubtfully round the room; her appearance at last alarmed O'Connor, he spoke to her more gently and kindly, but he got no answer; her eyes still wandered in a sort of melancholy inquiry, or settled in unmeaning abstraction; worlds would he have given to hear again that one word—"father"—but he heard it no more; reason had only been on the threshold, and his frightful words had banished it for ever: long did he watch and wait for the termination of what he thought was a renewal of her fever, but the fever that was now in her brain was only to terminate with her life; from that day Eveleen was calm, pensive, gentle as a lamb, but totally devoid of reason; she seldom or never spoke, but she looked so full of melancholy meaning you could almost give words to the silent language of her looks. Her wretched father looked on all this as the punishment of his sins; he thought every one shrunk from him as some evil thing; he no longer attended to his former occupations, his place went to ruin, and at last thinking to atone for his sins and those of his children, he took a vow of voluntary poverty, and selling what yet remained of his property, he employed the money in endeavouring to procure for them, in another world, the happiness they had lost in this, and he wandered about with his sorrow-stricken child,

"Seeking the world's cold charity,"

till he died on the way-side, and left poor Eveleen destitute of home or protector, save that, as the people told me, "sure God takes care of her, when he took away the creature's reason."

THE DREAMER.

I dreamt that o'er life's troubled sea,
My little bark swam merrily;
The sails were fill'd with breezes mild,
The sun was warm, the blue heav'n smiled;
I saw in all th' enchanting scene
Nought but the azure and the green,
Nor deem'd that ev'ry wind and wave
Spoke but of danger and the grave;
I dreamt that we were born to give
But happiness to all that live;
That chief of all from man to man,
Th' electric spark of kindness ran.

I dreamt that woman's love was pure,
And would thro' ev'ry change endure,
That tho' as summer streamlets bright,
Reflecting ev'ry glance of light,
It was not e'en at fervid noon
Or shallow, or exhausted soon.
I dreamt affection ne'er decay'd,
Nor love grew cold, nor truth betray'd:
I dreamt that all were as they seem.—
I woke—and lo! 'twas but a dream!
I woke—and stung with grief and pain,
Ne'er turn'd to dream *that* dream again!

B. 8.